

Mayor's Column for the October 31, 2012 Review

Happy Halloween! I hope you enjoy Evansville's little ghosts, witches, fairies, and goblins. Last year nearly 600 youngsters in amazing costumes visited our home.

Mid-October means annual conference time for Wisconsin local governments. Alders Barbara Jacobson and Jon Senn, Public Works Superintendent Dave Wartenweiler, and I attended the League of Municipalities convention in Wisconsin Dells. A financial focus was prevalent throughout the programs and sessions.

Five resolutions were passed during the conference business meeting. They were in support of: restoration of shared revenue funding; ensuring municipalities receive timely and reliable financial information from the state; treating all municipal employees the same with respect to Wisconsin Retirement System contributions; preservation of tax exempt financing; and preservation of municipal utility PILOTs (payment in lieu of taxes). The League Board of Directors encouraged local adoption of these resolutions.

Our Common Council has already passed a resolution in support of preservation of tax exempt financing, which lowers the taxpayer cost of capital for local infrastructure projects and other needs. A proposed resolution on PILOTs will be considered at the November Council meeting. The Council will discuss additional possible future resolutions.

One of the programs Alderwoman Jacobson attended was a breakout session on asset management. An accurate inventory of all city assets had been discussed briefly at our September Committee of the Whole meeting, with recognition that the city can improve in this area. Alder Jacobson will share information and her insights with the Council.

Alderman Senn serves on the City Economic Development Committee and the Redevelopment Authority. Included in his itinerary were programs on economic development and tax incremental financing (TIF). He is interested in additional in-depth training on TIF, the major economic development tool for local governments.

Dave Wartenweiler attended public works oriented sessions, including programs on looming emerald ash borer issues and implementing effective local electronics recycling.

One of the breakout programs I attended was on GIS (Geographic Information System) for smaller communities, presented by Brian Berquist, our City Engineer and Vice-President of Town and Country Engineering, and his co-worker, Dustin Esser. Smaller communities are beginning to move beyond the static map books, wall maps, and project drawings, with periodic updates that add or revise information. Computer-based GIS allows many improved services, including real-time updates to system information, the ability to combine information and add overlays as needed for projects, and worksite availability via laptops, smart phones, etc. Infrastructure asset management information can be included as part of GIS, e.g., the date of installation of a specific valve, size, manufacturer, and material composition.

Costs of local government GIS conversion can be lowered by beginning with a basic system and adding “layers”. Included in the City of Evansville 2013 proposed budget are dollars to begin building local GIS using our electric and water maps and related information.

Another program I attended was on municipal levy limits and exemptions. Mike Harrigan and Phil Cosson of Ehlers and Associates walked through the calculations used to determine a community’s levy limit. (The Ehlers firm has been our city financial advisor for years.) Levy limits are causing financial difficulties for many Wisconsin communities. Evansville has been fortunate to be able to build strong budgets while staying under our limit. We have not been “taxing to the max.”

I also attended a session on impacts of Act 10, presented by Attorney Nancy Pirkey. The gist of her presentation was that there are a variety of unresolved or undefined issues that make this collective bargaining legislation “clear as mud.” Attorney Pirkey believes that it may be 3 to 5 years before there are answers to many of the issues. She urged caution in altering current local implementation of Act 10 until there is additional clarity.

Another workshop of note included discussion of the League’s legislative agenda. Continued downward pressure on municipal revenue sources is expected going forward. Additional municipalities will encounter financial difficulties. The League intends to be more proactive in addressing municipal issues, needs, and consequences of proposed state legislation. They also recognize the need to be agile and flexible in serving Wisconsin local governments through dissemination of information and advocacy.

The Evansville Common Council has recently reinforced our commitment to ongoing training and education of officials and staff. Enhancement of existing skills, development of new skills, obtaining new knowledge, and gaining understanding of changing operational and political dynamics—these are some of the ways to increase public service excellence for our community. We are hard at work building our capacity for efficiency, effectiveness, and quality.

Community Announcements

Restrooms in the parks are now winterized and are closed for the season.

Wednesday evening hours for the city waste yard facility end on October 31. Saturday hours of 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. will end after Saturday, November 24.

Public hearing on the 2013 City budget will be held on November 13 at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Early voting is underway. Evansville residents can vote at City Hall through Thursday, November 1, from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and on Friday, November 2, from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There is no early voting on Monday, November 5.

Evansville residents vote on Election Day, Tuesday, November 6, at Creekside Place, 102 Maple Street, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Community Thanks

Evansville citizens appreciate and thank local businesses for their continuing support of community organizations and activities. In recent weeks, from Homecoming and Oktoberfest to customer service workshops and Grove Society annual meeting, local businesses have supported and contributed to events with sponsorships, auction donations, door prizes, and/or volunteers. Our local businesses are active participants in enhancing our quality of life.